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SUBJECT: SLOVENIA WELCOMES EU COMMISSION PROPOSAL AS WAY TO  
MOVE AHEAD ON CROATIA'S EU ACCESSION

Classified By: CDA Grace Shelton, Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (SBU) During a February 5 briefing for heads of diplomatic missions on Slovenia's positions on Slovenia-Croatia relations, MFA State Secretary Dragoljuba Bencina emphasized that Slovenia welcomed the Ollie Rehn proposal as the appropriate solution. She told the diplomatic corps that PM Pahor and FM Zbogar were meeting with counterparts to discuss the financial crisis as well as relay Slovenia's position on its relations with Croatia. (Note: PM Pahor met with PM Gordon Brown and members of the UK Parliament in London, and will meet Sarkozy in Paris on February 5; FM Zbogar travelled from Strasbourg to Prague and will travel to Munich over the weekend; he plans to go to Hungary, Austria and Italy.) According to press reports from London, on February 4 PM Pahor welcomed the Rehn proposal saying, "this is now the only realistic option to arrive at a solution or a proposed solution in a reasonably short time."

¶2. (U) Bencina reviewed the FM's talking points that he had used in Strasbourg after meetings at the European Parliament and that he would use elsewhere. The highlights of the Slovenian position are:

- The Ollie Rehn proposal could be the basis of a solution because it combines political and legal sides of the issue.
- Mediation is the fastest way to a solution.
- Slovenia is open for bilateral dialogue, referencing the conversation between PMs Pahor and Sanader and their agreement to meet in 2-3 weeks.
- Slovenia remains committed to EU enlargement, looking for a way to give a green light to Croatia.
- Croatia has open border questions with all of its neighboring states from the former Yugoslavia, and solving one of the four would show Croatia's positive attitude and set a good example for the western Balkans.
- Through the mediation proposal, with the appropriate political will, the border dispute could be solved this year in line with Croatia's EU accession timeline.
- The border as of June 25, 1991 is the important date to use.
- Slovenia will withdraw its reservations if agreement is reached.

¶3. (SBU) Bencina was not able to say much more and explained that all concerned must still talk about details of the Rehn proposal. She confirmed that Slovenia would like to close the border issue before accession, but whether this could happen or whether it would happen by the end of the year depended on Croatia. She acknowledged that Croatia still had not given an official reaction to the Rehn proposal, although the media had reported a negative reaction from the government to the proposal on mediation. The MFA passed out a short non-paper outlining "Slovenia's positions and views on the resolution of prejudices to the issue of the border between Slovenia and Croatia in connection with the negotiation process for Croatia's EU membership" (e-mailed to

Department).

Comment

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14. (C) Slovenia has been slow in trying to get its side of the story out in a coherent way, but appears to be making a more concerted effort now. Its efforts - PM and FM meeting counterparts with the message that Slovenia supports enlargement, and Croatia's accession, and welcomes the Rehn proposal - may resonate with the other EU member states. It is too early to tell whether it will help lead to a solution.

The government of Slovenia hopes that Croatia will also respond positively to the Rehn proposal.

SHELTON